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SURVIVING THE DIGITAL AGE: A CONUNDRUM FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Johannesburg, 13 September 2024: South Africa's media industry is at the crossroads. The decline of traditional print newspapers is no longer speculation - it's a reality. Rising production costs, shrinking advertising revenue, and changing consumer habits have made it increasingly difficult for print media to sustain itself.

The era of picking up a newspaper every morning is fading, and the shift to digital platforms has become inevitable.

Globally, and even here in South Africa, digital media is outpacing print. Online advertising now accounts for over half of global ad spend, while print advertising continues to shrink.

Readers, too, have moved on. Modern audiences, particularly the younger generation, prefer content that is accessible, engaging, and immediate. The question is not whether media should adapt to these changes but how quickly it can.

Yet, the move to digital is not without challenges. Websites and digital subscriptions are effective for reach, but they struggle to hold attention in an era of information overload. This is where short-form content steps in as the future of media.

Podcasts, YouTube videos, and bite-sized clips on social media are not just trends - they are reshaping how news is consumed.

In South Africa, platforms like *Newzroom Afrika* combine traditional reporting with short, impactful videos to engage audiences. Globally, *The New York Times* has shown the power of multimedia with its podcast, *The Daily*, which reaches millions.

These formats appeal to modern audiences who prefer listening or watching over reading. They cater to fast-paced lives while still delivering informative and thought-provoking content.

YouTube, in particular, offers immense opportunities for monetisation and audience growth. Creators and media outlets can generate revenue through ads, subscriptions, and sponsorships while building strong connections with their audience.

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) further amplify reach, making it easier to market content effectively.



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It's crucial to acknowledge that many traditional media outlets have faced serious challenges over the years. At times, these platforms were subjected to sabotage - external factors that sought to undermine their existence.

Despite these setbacks, traditional media houses have shown remarkable resilience and remain key players in the South African media space. Their survival and continued impact in the industry are a testament to their strength and dedication as formidable information reservoirs.

However, embracing obtaining changes in the media landscape is not just about survival – it is about thriving in a competitive industry. Investing in multimedia skills for journalists, collaborating with digital creators, and prioritising local stories can create a winning formula.

South Africans are eager for content that speaks to their realities, and short-form media can deliver that more effectively than print or TV ever could.

Change is not optional - it's essential. Journalism's core values of truth, accountability, and storytelling must remain intact, but the methods of delivery must evolve. The decline of print media is not the end of journalism; it is an opportunity to innovate, connect, and lead.

The future of media in South Africa lies in adaptation. Traditional media organisations must rise to the challenge or face sure extinction. The time to act is now.

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